

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 213158

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, TH, CB

SUBJECT: CONTRACT FOR AIR LIFT SUPPORT OF GKR

REF: A. BANGKOK 14648; B. SECDEF091950Z SEP 74

1. WE APPRECIATE YOUR CONCERN ABOUT THE SHIFT OF AIR LIFT
SUPPORT FOR CAMBODIA FROM THE USAF TO CONTRACT OPERATORS.
HOWEVER, SUCH A CHANGE IS NECESSARY IF WE ARE TO CONTINUE
OUR EFFORT TO WORK TOWARD AN ORDERLY SETTLEMENT OF THE
SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THE THAI HAVE A DIRECT
INTEREST IN SUCH A SETTLEMENT, AND WE SUGGEST YOU STRESS
THIS IN YOUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE THAI.

2. WE ARE AWARE THAT YOU HAVE TACTICAL PROBLEMS WITH THE
THAIS, BUT THEY SHOULD REALIZE THAT REDUCING USAF INVOLVE-
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MENT IN THE AIR LIFT SUPPORT OF THE GKR INCREASES OUR ABILITY TO CONTINUE THIS VITAL OPERATION. EVERY EFFORT IS BEING MADE TO DEVELOP A KAF CAPABILITY TO TAKE OVER AIR RESUPPLY, BUT THIS CANNOT BE ACCOMPLISHED FOR ONE YEAR AT BEST. IN THE MEANTIME, THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE TO THE C-130 AIR LAND/AIR DROP OPERATION WHICH, BARRING THE USAF, CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED ONLY THROUGH THESE CIVILIAN CONTRACT ARRANGMENTS.

3. APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES HAVE BEEN INFORMED PER REFERENCE B. HOWEVER, THE INFORMATION GIVEN TO

CONGRESS WAS ON A CLASSIFIED BASIS AND THUS FAR CONGRESS HAD NOT RELEASED THE INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC. PRESS GUIDANCE TRANSMITTED SEPTTEL PROVIDES A COMPLETE AND ACCURATE EXPLANATION OF THIS ACTION. YOU NEED NOT

BE DEFENSIVE IN EXPLAINING IT FULLY TO THE RTG AND ANY OTHERS INTERESTED.

4. THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS APPLY TO VARIOUS POINTS OF CRITICISM SUGGESTED IN REF A THAT COULD CONTRIBUTE TO MISUNDERSTANDING:

(A) CHARGE: THE BIRD ARRANGEMENT IS A REINTRODUCTION OF AIR AMERICA(REF A PARA 3). FACT: THERE IS NO CONNECTION BETWEEN BIRD AND AIR AMERICA. BIRD IS AN ESTABLISHED AMERICAN BUSINESSMAN WHO HAS HAD SEVERAL LEGITIMATE AND OVERT ENTERPRISES IN THAILAND FOR MANY YEARS. THE FIRM HAS NO CONNECTION WITH ANY USG AGENCY EXCEPT THROUGH LEGITIMATE CONTRACTS. A PREVIOUS BIRD ASSOCIATION WITH ANOTHER USG AGENCY FOR AIRCRAFT OPERATIONS IN LAOS IN THE EARLY 1960'S ENDED IN 1965. BIRD CURRENTLY HAS A CONTRACT WITH USAID/LAOS TO SUPPORT REFUGEE AND HUMANITARIAN DELIVERIES OF FOOD AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES BUT THESE ACTIVITIES ARE NOT CONNECTED WITH OTHER BIRD ACTIVITIES IN CAMBODIA. FINALLY, THE RTG HAS ITSELF INDICATED THAT BIRD IS ACCEPTABLE TO IT AND IS, IN FACT, FRO; THIS VIEWPOINT THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE CONTRACTOR.

(B) CHARGE: BIRD AIR CREWS WILL BE FLYING USAF SUPPLIED
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C-130'S TEMPORARILY IDENTIFIED (FOR COVER PURPOSES) AS CAMBODIAN REGISTERED AIR CRAFT (REF A PARA 5). FACT: IT IS TRUE THAT THE USAF RETAINS RESIDUAL TITLE TO THE AIRCRAFT BUT THESE ARE THE ONLY AIRCRAFT AVAILABLE THAT ARE CAPABLE OF PERFORMING THIS MISSION. WE, THEREFORE, ARE PROVIDING THE AIRCRAFT TO BIRD AS GOVERNMENT FURNISHED EQUIPMENT (GFE), A PROCEDURE FREQUENTLY UTILIZED IN

CONTRACTS LET BY USG. THE CAMBODIAN REGISTRATIONS AND MARKINGS ARE NOT FOR DECEPTION OR DISGUISE. DURING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE MISSION THE AIR CRAFT INVOLVED DO BELONG LEGALLY TO THE CONTRACTOR AND THEY ARE REGISTERED AS CAMBODIAN AIRCRAFT PURELY FOR CONVENIENCE IN FLIGHT CLEARANCE. ALL PARTIES INVOLVED UNDERSTAND THIS.

(C) CHARGE: THE AIR CREWS TO HANDLE THESE SOPHISTICATED AIRCRAFT MUST BE FORMER USAF PERSONNEL NOW RETIRED OR RELEASED FROM ACTIVE DUTY (E.G., PERSONNEL WHO HAVE CHANGED SUITS FOR COVER PURPOSES) (REF A PARA 6). FACT: IT IS TRUE THAT BIRD'S C-130 CREWS WILL PROBABLY BE MOSTLY

FORMER USAF PERSONNEL BUT THIS IS INEVITABLE SINCE ONLY AMONG RETIRED USAF PERSONNEL COULD ONE FIND CREWMEN TRAINED IN OPERATING THE SOPHISTICATED VERSION OF THE C-130. IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO TRAIN NEW PERSONNEL IN THESE AIRCRAFT BUT THIS COULD BE PROHIBITIVELY EXPENSIVE AND TIME CONSUMING. HOWEVER, WE ARE ASSURED THAT ALL CONTRACT CREW MEMBERS HAD ALREADY RETIRED OR GIVEN NOTICE OF INTENT TO SEPARATE BEFORE THIS CONTRACT WAS CONCEIVED AND WERE NOT DELIBERATELY RECRUITED FROM ACTIVE DUTY FOR THIS ROLE. WE HAVE NO HESITATION IN EXPLAINING THEIR STATUS TO INQUIRERS.

(D) CHARGE: WE ARE IN HASTE TO GET THE BLUE SUITS OUT OF THE COCKPIT OF THESE C-130'S DESPITE OUR INSISTENCE THAT THEIR PARTICIPATION IS LEGAL (REF A PARA 8). FACT: OUR REASONS FOR WANTING TO REMOVE USAF FROM THESE OPERATIONS HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH LEGALITY IN TERMS OF EITHER US LAW OR INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS. OUR REASONS ARE AS STATED IN PRESS GUIDANCE. LEGALITY OF USAF OPERATIONS IS NOT IN DOUBT.

(E) CHARGE: DECEPTION IS IMPLIED BY FACT THAT AIRCRAFT CONFIDENTIAL

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WILL BE LOADED AT THE MILITARY BASE U TAPAO RATHER THAN AT THE CIVILIAN BASE, DON MUANG (REF A PARA 9). FACT: THIS IS DONE FOR LOGISTICAL CONVENIENCE PRIMARILY BUT SHOULD ALSO SERVE TO REDUCE VISIBILITY OF THE OPERATION, WHICH WE BELIEVE RTG WOULD FAVOR.

5. IN YOUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE THAI WE URGE THAT YOU MAKE THE POINT THAT A LOWERED US MILITARY PROFILE IN OUR SUPPORT FOR THE GKR INCREASES OUR ABILITY TO CONTINUE THIS VITAL OPERATION AND THUS TO CONTINUE OUR PROTECTION OF MUTUAL THAI AND US INTERESTS IN SEA. WE THINK THAT THESE CONTRACT ARRANGEMENTS CAN STAND SCRUTINY, AND IN THIS CONNECTION WE PLAN TO ISSUE A LOW KEY PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT HERE (SEPTTEL) IN ORDER TO FORESTALL ANY ACCUSATIONS THAT

WE ARE ENGAGING IN SOMETHING DEVIOUS WHICH MUST BE
COVERED UP. KISSINGER

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